

# Agricultural Missions

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## Their Place in the Development of the Rural Community

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# AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS

## Their Place in the Development of the Rural Community

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BENJAMIN<sup>\*</sup> H HUNNICUTT

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THINK I am safe in making the statement that in all lands where our Missions are now operating the majority of the population is rural. Certainly in many of the mission fields 90% or more of the population is rural in its mode of living and method of gaining a livelihood.

This being the case, Missions cannot overlook the very great importance of rural life, in all its phases and problems. Christ Himself gave us the example of interest in mankind where man might best comprehend, and certainly He never spared Himself in helping man where he most needed help. Christ did very practical things in a very direct way.

It seems extraordinary that foreign missions were carried on so long without the agricultural needs of the people being taken into consideration. In fact, it is only some three decades since the first real Agricultural Missionary was sent out.

I myself seem to have been about the first student volunteer for strictly agricultural work, and I volunteered in 1905. When the time came for going out to the field, there was no call for an agricultural worker. I finally arrived in Brazil to organize an agricultural school in December, 1907.

Agricultural missions are still in their infancy, and their status with the boards at home, the missions on the field,

policies of development and work are all matters of very grave study. Fortunately, we have the International Association of Agricultural Missions in New York that serves as a center for the consideration of our problems and as a point of contact between the man on the field and the home base.

As I see it, the rural community is to be reached through the three classic methods of all agricultural work—teaching, research, and demonstration (extension). The main emphasis should probably be on the latter method. The conditions on each field will determine the best method of procedure.

## THE TEACHING OF AGRICULTURE.

As the work of agricultural betterment in any foreign community can only be guided by the foreign missionary, he must necessarily prepare others for teaching, so that the work may develop more rapidly and ultimately become entirely indigenous. With this in mind, the following subjects are naturally suggested: Grade of teaching; objective; faculty; equipment; and governmental relations.

The great problem is to train native leaders for reaching the rural community as thoroughly as possible. Let me say here at the beginning that our agricultural mission enterprises should not compete with similar activities of the government, but rather supplement them, except where there is room for the work of both. The mission work must be done especially as an aid to the Christian community.

## GRADE OF WORK.

The teaching of agriculture may, of course, be of any grade from the primary work up to full college work. There are at least two agricultural mission schools doing college-grade work—one at Lavras, Brazil, and one at Canton, China. The grade of work to be done is determined entirely by the con-



ditions to be met and the people to be worked among. In Central Africa and in many parts of South America there would be no demand for college-grade work, certainly not for generations to come. It seems that the greater part of the teaching at present would necessarily be elementary, certainly not higher than high-school grade.



The thing that determines the type of teaching to be pursued is the adaptability of the instruction to the needs of the pupils. As North Americans, with our highly developed agricultural life, the tendency is to want to implant as rapidly as possible our modern mechanical agriculture. But as a matter of actual practice this would more often be a mistake.

Fundamental problems of the native agriculture must be studied and understood by the teacher before he can put across his message in the classroom. In most of the elementary agricultural schools the actual *doing* of the agricultural work would be the best method of teaching.

## OBJECTIVE.

The objective of all teaching is the imparting of knowledge and stimulation of the desire to acquire knowledge. In the particular case under consideration it is desired to impart the knowledge to the one being taught that will enable him to produce more at less expense and effort. The rural population in most of our mission fields is pitifully poor and lead a most desolate and unattractive life. Christians everywhere are fired with an ambition to live better, socially as well as morally, and an increase of income is essential in most cases. And often it is a case of increased production or perpetual half-starvation. Surely if we strive to convert these rural workers to Christ, we should also strive to teach them to be able to be better workmen in their chosen craft.

Again, the great problem is to winnow out what should be taught, finding out how it may best be taught so as to be practically applied by the one learning.

The objective here is a double one: teaching the individual for his immediate needs, and teaching leaders and teachers for the ever-widening scope of the whole program.

## FACULTY.

There is now an abundance of material from which any board at home can choose men for its agricultural missions. It is not necessary any longer to expect the evangelistic missionary reared on the farm at home to lay aside his preaching work so as to give his time to the mission farm. It would seem advisable wherever agricultural mission work is undertaken to have at least one technically trained man from the home church, using what trained native help might be available. Where there are no such helpers, he must train them. At Lavras the faculty consists of four North Americans and as many Brazilians.

It goes without saying that the Agricultural Missionary should possess the true missionary motive and be as truly a Christian himself as any evangelistic missionary.

## EQUIPMENT.

The equipment of an Agricultural Missionary depends largely on the class of the work to be done. In every case a farm would be indispensable. In many missions the school buildings already in operation would be entirely sufficient, the agricultural work being in addition to the other courses, or at least done in the same buildings as the other school work.

To equip a school of junior or full college grade is a very expensive thing, for agricultural education is not cheap. At Lavras the investment is already at one hundred thousand dollars, and much is yet to be done. More will be said of the farm equipment later on.

A certain amount of laboratory equipment is essential; and while nothing fancy need be supplied, sufficient equipment must be had for satisfactory work of the grade planned.

## RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION.

Scientific research work is difficult and very expensive and ordinarily lies out of the scope of missionary endeavor. Nevertheless, a certain amount of experimental work must be undertaken. The greater the care that is given this work, the greater will be the results. Nothing should be taught that has not been proved. Conditions on the field are often so very different from what the missionary is accustomed to at home that experimental work must be done before he is in a position to teach.

The amount of this kind of work, and its character, will largely depend upon the aptitude of the missionary in charge



and the funds available. In many cases it will be feasible to obtain government funds for this specific work.

## DEMONSTRATION AND EXTENSION.

For the practical development of the agricultural missions, the first essential is a farm. It is on this farm that the missionary himself is going to get the right angle on the local problems, that the student is going to get his practice work, and that the farmer may get his visible demonstration.



In most cases the farm can also be used to provide additional revenue for the work, although too much must not be expected along this line.

The size of the farm depends entirely on local conditions. It may as easily be too large as too small. In a country where agriculture is purely extensive, several hundred acres will be needed; where it is entirely intensive, a much smaller tract will be sufficient. In no case should the farm be so large as



to make its exploitation purely a commercial enterprise. As I see it, missionaries and mission money can be put to a better purpose.

As a matter of economics, the size of the farm is a very important determining factor in its successful operation. The farm should be large enough to make its financial operation a success. At Lavras the farm comprises some six hundred acres, and makes possible the cultivation of all the principal crops of the surrounding country, as well as the breeding of cattle and hogs on a paying scale. Wherever possible it would seem wise to have the whole mission enterprise located on the farm.

The farm help will, of course, be largely the native help. Students can be used to a large extent, although I doubt whether a farm can successfully be manned for all the work by students.

The practical experience at Lavras with the native help has been very comforting. Many of the workmen have joined the Church, many have become small proprietors, and many have gone out to other positions of more influence and better pay.

## DEMONSTRATION WORK.

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Farmers must be encouraged to visit the mission farm, knowing that they will get a sympathetic hearing at any time, and that the missionary is trying to work out his very problems on the farm. These visits should not be left to chance, but definite invitations extended and definite demonstrations of some crop cultivation or breeding work should be arranged and the farmers in general invited to attend.

The influence in a community of a properly kept and managed farm is very large and difficult to measure. Often one good farm quietly but surely changes the whole farm practice of a community. It must not be forgotten, however,

that the farmer of every land is terribly set in his ways, and much work must be done to get him out of any rut.

## EXTENSION WORK.

By "extension work" is meant the carrying of the agricultural teaching directly to the farmer who will not come to the mission or to the school. There are over 600,000 farmers in Brazil, and probably not more than a thousand students of agriculture. How to reach this great mass is the question. Each mission can undertake to reach thoroughly its immediate community, and in a general way the whole nation. Effort can be directed along very specific lines or can be more general. It will be better to hammer along specific problems for a time, and then change as conditions change.



The personnel for extension work may be the same as the school staff, or may be especially designated workers. In most cases it would seem wise to have at each agricultural mission center at least one especially trained and gifted man, exclusively for extension work. The problem of the great mass

of farmers is so important that we should not wait to reach them through simple school efforts, any more than we would plan to do all our evangelistic work through schools and the training of native workers.

## MAINTENANCE.

The cost of extension work is rather heavy, and produces no income directly. Farm work may be made to pay, teaching is ordinarily charged for, but extension work must be gratis. If the evangelistic effort is co-ordinated with the agricultural extension work, it seems to be just as legitimate a use of mission funds as any other.

One of the objectives in all mission effort is to gain sympathy for the cause of the Gospel. Certainly there are few agencies that might be used so effectively for this end as extension work in agriculture.

Government funds may be obtained for this work, or private firms may be interested in contributing, as has been the case at Lavras.

## METHODS OF EXTENSION WORK. ✕

The principal methods of developing this work are, visitations, publications, organizations, fairs, and co-operation.

Visitations to the farms themselves offer the best method, because the most direct contacts can thus be established. The person used for this work should be essentially a practical man and a good mixer, as his personal sympathy will be a great factor in the amount of good accomplished.

By publications of the mission itself, or by contributions to the agricultural press of the country, much can be done. Over 100,000 copies of publications have been put out by the faculty of the Lavras College, and just now two regular publications are being printed in the College Shop. One is gotten



out by the students; the other is a national swine breeders' magazine, edited by the Dean for the National Swine Breeders' Association.

Many of the publications mentioned above are official Government bulletins, written by the Dean of the college. The time may come when the college may have funds of its own, when it can publish its own bulletins.

## ORGANIZATIONS.

The Agricultural Missionary's effort may very easily be linked up with the community at large by promoting a local organization of some sort. By an agricultural society, cattle association, or through boys' and girls' clubs, the community may be induced to take a greater interest in its own welfare, with the missionary's help.



It has been my privilege in Brazil to direct several times the National Corn Show, and just now I am busy preparing for National Corn Week in August, when we will have a fair and try in every way to get the people interested in corn

culture. Right at Lavras an annual fair is held on the College Campus, and the fourth is scheduled for July, 1925. Several thousand people visit the fair every year, and all the community is reached in some way. Not only are farm products shown, but also school exhibits and the women's domestic work, so that the whole family finds something of interest.

Every agricultural mission center could have an annual fair, no matter how small the community, and in many cases a whole State could be interested. Anyone familiar with agricultural progress in the United States and in Europe knows what a very vital part the fairs have in this development.

### CO-OPERATION.

In extension work and in all the efforts of the Agricultural Missionary, he must be on the lookout for the co-operation of the natives of the country where he lives.

In the fair at Lavras, just mentioned above, we have the co-operation of the local agricultural society, organized by the Dean of the college, of the local farmers, schools, and merchants of the County, State, and Federal Governments.

Prizes are offered by the big city merchants, and medals are sent each year from the Brazilian Agricultural Society at Paris, France. An outdoor movie with educational films instructs all, and, of course, the indispensable band plays to the delight of all.

This year a community or folk-lore chorus is to be given, and each year some new feature will be added to interest the community at large.

### GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS.

This general theme has been left for the last. It is often supposed that all initiative for agricultural betterment should come from the government and be paid for by the govern-

ment. This is no more true of agriculture than it is of medicine or anything else.

Agricultural missions must co-operate with the government and at all times maintain with the government the most cordial relations possible. In a quiet, unobtrusive way, leadership should be given the government officials wherever this is possible. Our work in Lavras has been subsidized for years, by the County, State, and Federal Governments. On the whole, the relations with all the government authorities have been unusually cordial and pleasing. The State of Minas maintains ten scholarships in the school, while the aid from the Federal Government can only be applied to the permanent improvements of the college and its farm.

On more than one occasion the Dean has been asked to aid in some definite development of government work. Just at present a course for elementary agricultural schools of the State of Minas is being worked out. Whenever an invitation is received from the government for help, it is given even at a sacrifice to the more immediate needs of the local work.

In all agricultural work by missionaries, the Gospel must be predominant, and it is to be hoped that it always is. Rural communities must be evangelized as well as “*agriculturized*.”





